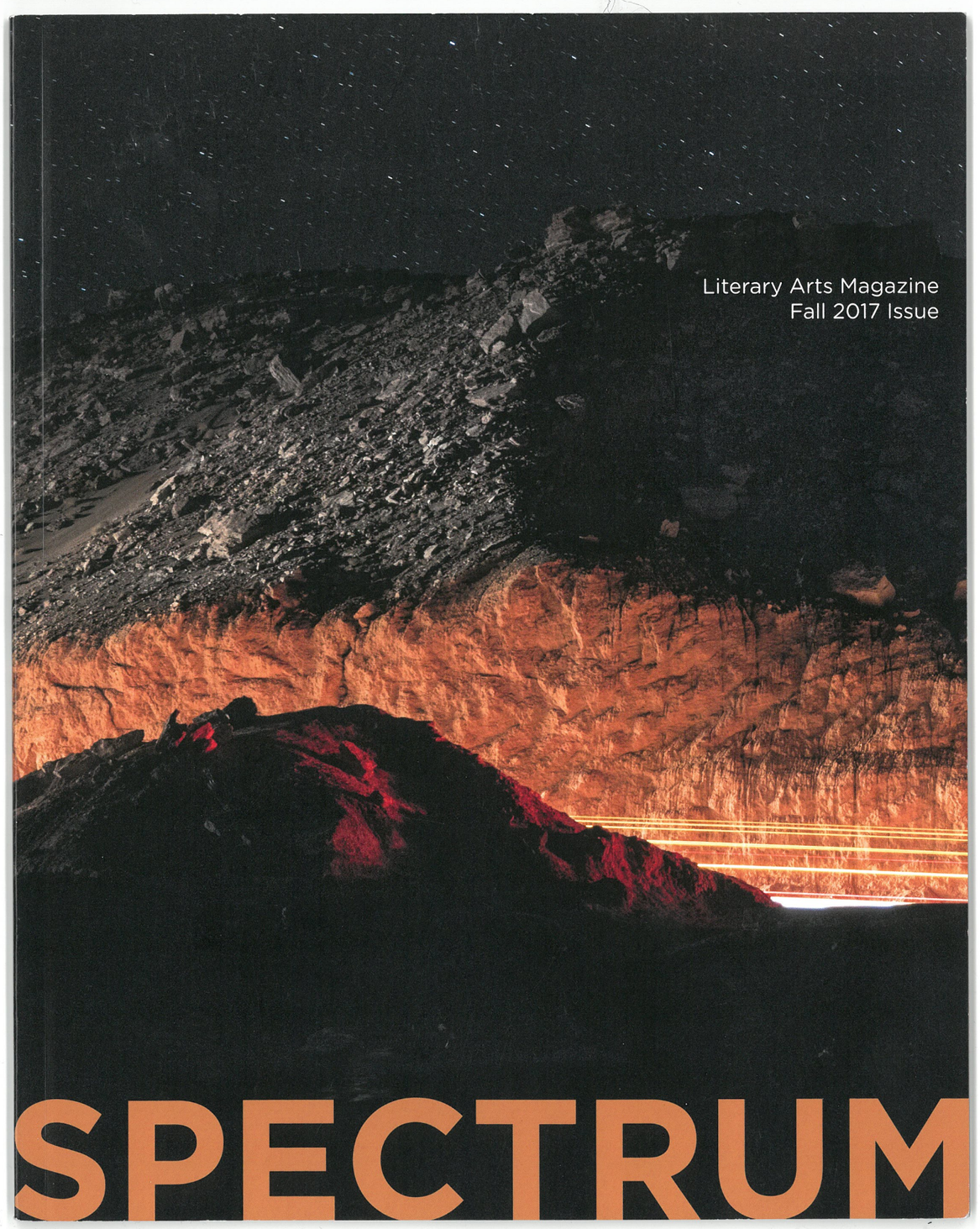

Literary Arts Magazine
Fall 2017 Issue

SPECTRUM

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Sarah Sherard
Doga Tasdemir

Contact

Office 234 Curry Student Center
Email spectrum.magazine@gmail.com
Mailbox 434 Curry Student Center

Cover art adapted from "Canyon Highway" by Jared Hirschfield.

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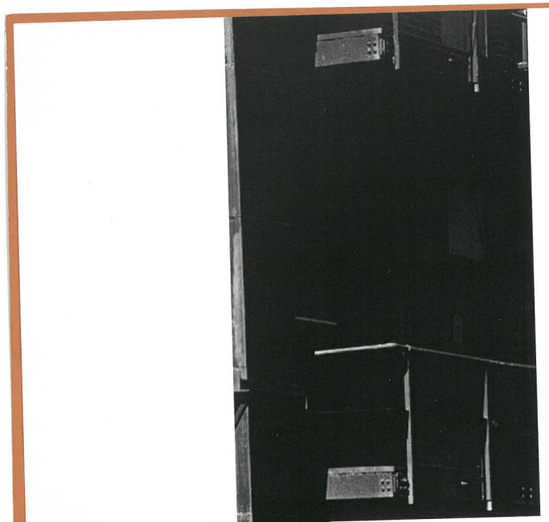
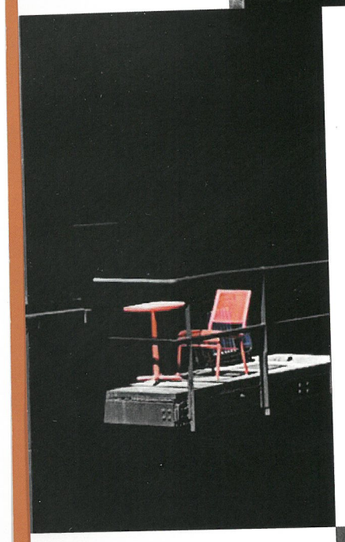
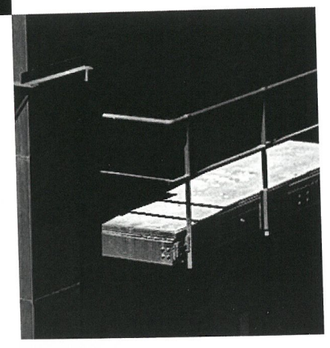




Trimming My Trees | Mara Donofrio

The deeper I hike into my field, the less I can talk about yours, or anything really
Besides what happens between "What hurts?" and "Come back if it still hurts"
I think we should talk—can you relate your java code to a cardiac code?
I'd like to use my words, but these are the only ones I have left
The others are shy veins that duck from searching needles
They're hiding when I need them and my sentences refuse to bleed
My prefixes and suffixes are all "-itis" and "-osis"—not even spellcheck catches my drift
My synapses are being clipped like Pangaea is splitting and everyone jumped to one continent
It's hard to see the trees when the whole forest is burning



Solace | Liam O'Donnell

take care | Sarah Sherard

Swallowed | Laura Ma

I dance in steps of three,
as light as dragonfly feet–
A little kiss on the pond;
it pulsates in

One, two, three
Four, five, six,

Fluttering and skittering
on the surface of rhythmic waves
flowing across the late afternoon light.

A sudden decrescendo subdues my waltz–
a reflection in the water
confronts me. The sun's rays fade from orange to blue;
the indefinite face of one reminiscent of my own slurs
into my shadow,
With my toes frozen in fear I
Suddenly realize–

somewhere between pianissimo and silence,
I am swallowed by the beating waves.

70 miles per hour | Taylor Clark

I could do with a long drive to nowhere right about now
Lines on the road indistinguishable from those for the next hundred miles
A voice crooning in the background,
a soundtrack to the thoughts racing through my head

I know I've been praying days away lately
Wishing through Mondays, Tuesdays,
Waiting for 5
For Friday
For next week
For next month
Next year

But now I feel like the fast forward button on my life is stuck
And I'm missing the small moments
I miss noticing how soft life can be

See I have this habit of barreling through the ends of phrases
Crashing through sixteenth rests
Seated gently for nuance
I'm too focused on speeding through the written notes
Breathing seems to take too much time
A pause isn't worth the moment spent
I hate sixteenth rests.

And I have this terrifying feeling
That I've missed something critical in the quiet
That somewhere in the cracks of these compressed, dense days,
That in those still moments where I was running
Talking
Screaming
Crying
I missed a Moment.
Like, a capitol "M" moment.

When I'm viewing the highlight reel of my life
The faces are going to blur
And all I'll know is a hurried walk
Through city streets
Because something in motion
Stays in motion
Until
It's
Stopped.

Town of the Silenced | Jared Hirschfield

Afternoon | Charlene Ng

Divining | Neiha Lasharie

some cooking tips:
1. when you cook chicken (breast, thigh or fillet)
make three thin nicks with a serrated knife
(okay, it's more for bread than poultry
but it was the only knife within reach).
stuff rosemary in each pocket
& smell the divinity in your kitchen.

2. most things are better crushed.
take garlic, mint, ice, an empty can:
press down on the flat of your knife (or)
smush up leaves, admire your green thumb (or)
take your blender/hammer: now pulse/smash (or)
bring your foot down hard on the can
(extra points for panache)
& smell the divinity–and beer–in your kitchen.

3. don't take offense if people ask
for salt or pepper with their food.
everyone has a different palate,
and besides, you always ask for hot sauce,
so why hold others to an unfair standard?
just bite your tongue,
nurse your ego in a separate room,
& smell the divinity of food shared in your kitchen.

4. they say that food cooked with more than five ingredients
is not as good as food cooked with three ingredients.
i'm not sure what the significance of three is,
but look: rice, meat and yogurt.
that's three, but that does not biryani make.
now toss in the garam masala, saffron, garlic, ginger, tomatoes, fennel, bay leaves, salt,
cardamom, cumin and peppercorn
& smell the divinity of your grandmother in your kitchen.

5. don't be disheartened when you realize that english is
all you can write any poetry in.
your mother sings a silken tongue, but no good chef
is the sum
of a single ingredient, however rich (or organic).
persian, arabic, turkish all threw in their loans,
but english lends itself nicely to being spun buttersoft.
so forgive your insecurities,
& smell the divinity of poetry in your kitchen.

... | Vignesh Chander

(ellipses elide opening
or so opening evoke
a coming close

Soon we're smushed between two
snug arms and our sideways smiles).

Definitively it's disproven that the Earth is flat.

Alien lands and swimmer's ear | Sarah Sherard

Sea Urchin | Julia Palmer

my blue period | Natalya Jean

i thought comparing this poem to the work of a master
might make up
for this shitty fucking analogy

(tho it's still a bit shit)
the only blue things here tonight
your hair
my fingers
(my heart)

the room is freezing
you curl up and into
my side
my hands shake

in my defense
my circulation's never been what it should
(you say that, she said that)
takes me a while to warm up

and I can't quite get a grip
on this pen
on these feelings

not tonight

Ode to a Horse Named Whisky | Lindsey Bressler

Air so clear no one could remember
how to say "pollution"
or "pneumonia"
or "breathe in."
Only the noise of military airplanes
reminding them

Every fourth night, the sky turns pumpkin colored.
It doesn't matter how hot it still is
that Halloween happens in March.

Deep breathing happens inside a
beautiful cage.

The vet checks his Google Calendar
and cross-references.
Dizzy with punctuality,
stumbling towards healing,
unafraid to make the first stitch.

What you brand, you own.

Show up and feed the hungry.
Forget about months, 30-year intervals and seconds.
Give to get. Trade air for wind.

A farm animal's tongue
licking hay off of
bare human palms feels
the way a constellation looks.

Wrecked | Justine Newman

Sinking | Elena Turner

i am the ocean
i am infinity
come float on my surface
drift in my currents
reach towards my horizons
i'll carry you in your sailboat
and we'll trace the north atlantic gyre
i am the waves you ride
i am the salt in your hair
i am the breeze that fills your lungs

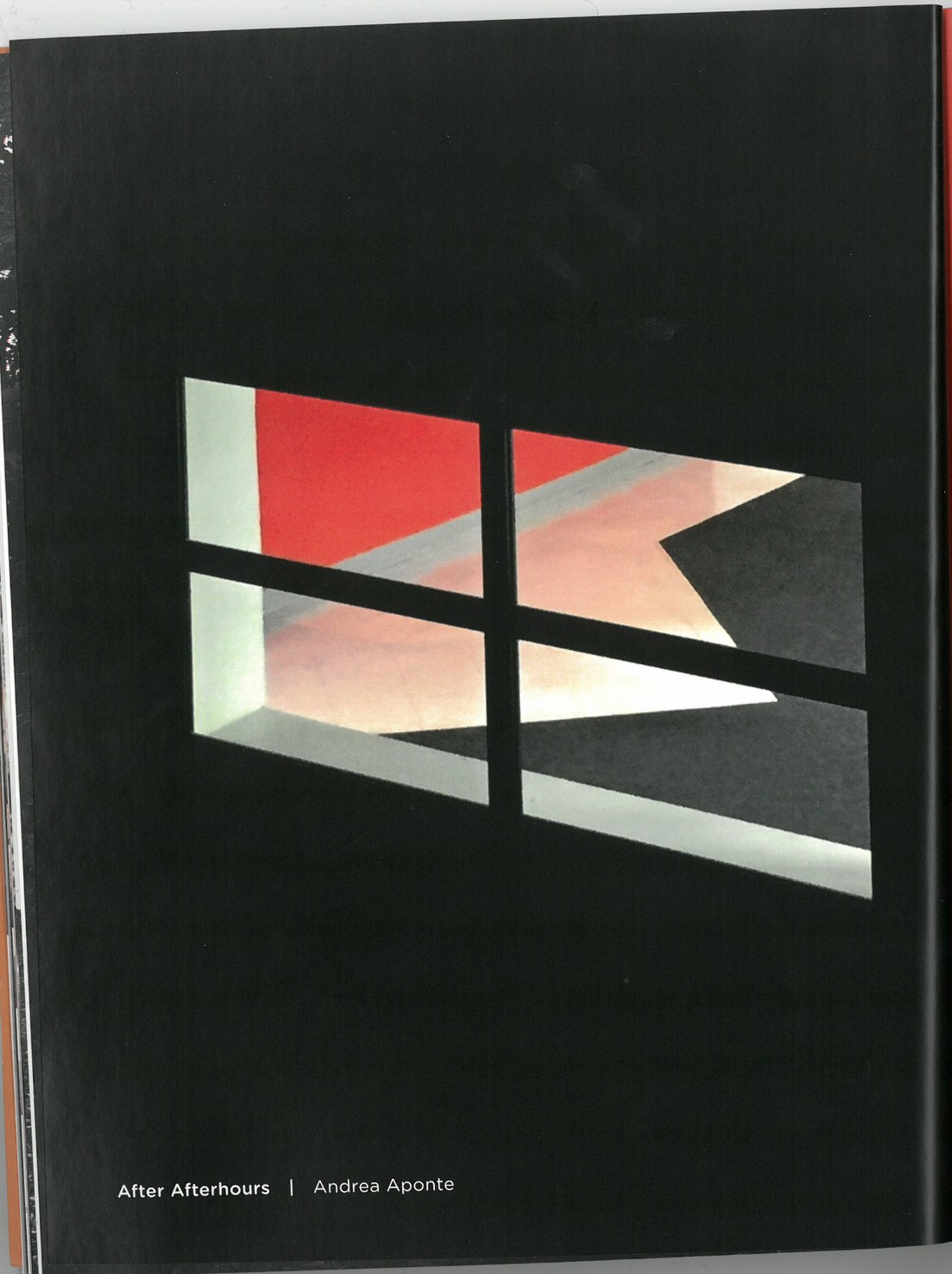
but don't get too close
cold water is more dense
and my burdens sink far below the surface
and if u ever feel the temperature drop
the pressure will be too great to drift back
and the sunlight will be too far away
to pull you back to the surface

Free Me | Noor Charif

vulnerability | Liam O'Donnell

Something I Shouldn't Be Saying | Felicity Henson

I love you
like an anxiety attack.
Like a flipping stomach
and shaky nerves in sweaty hands.
Like heart racing
and thoughts chasing, almost
throwing up.
I love you like
an anxiety attack.
Like nothing good.



After Afterhours | Andrea Aponte

stagnant | Shaughnessy Jones

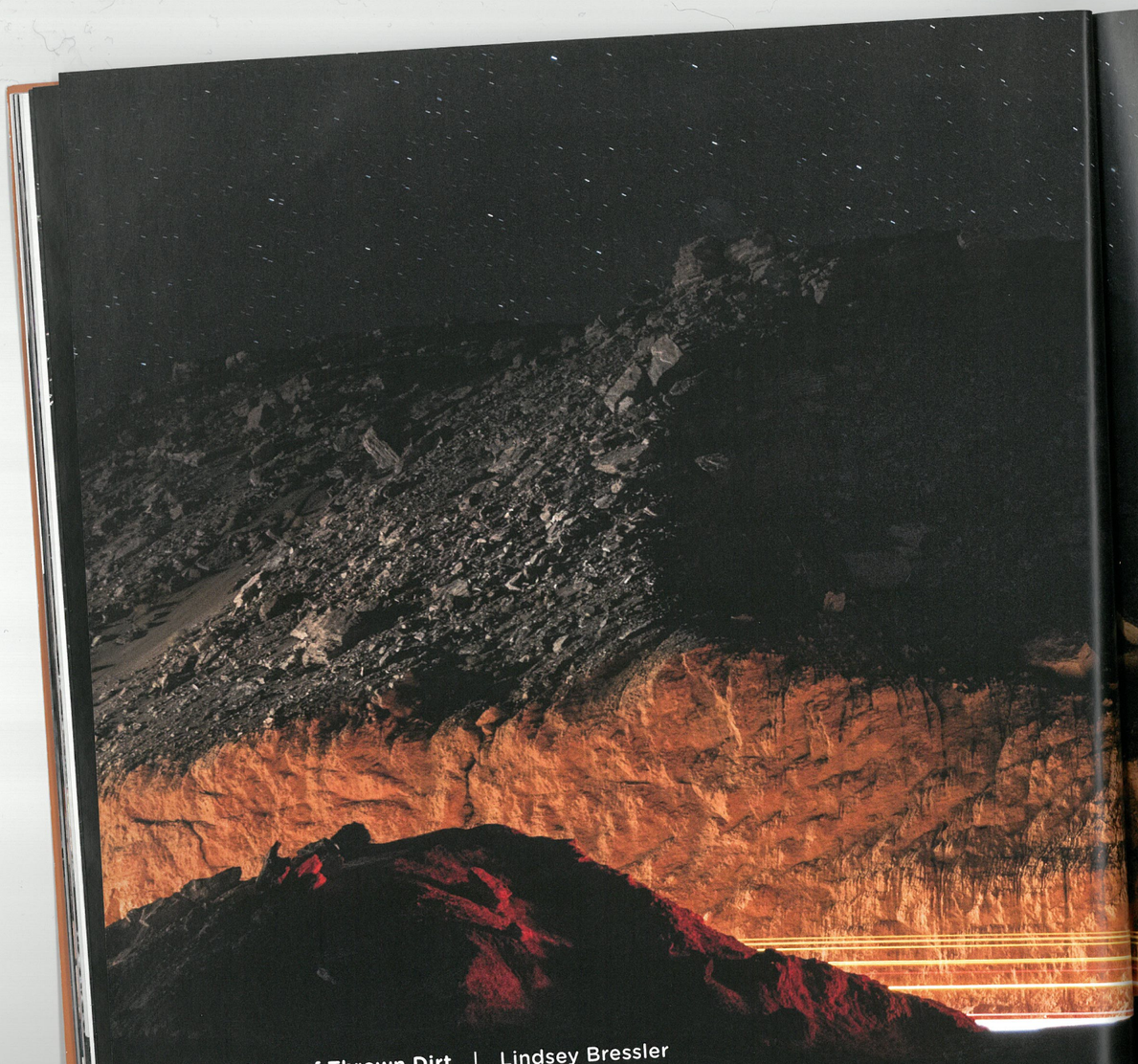
correctly interpret the measurements made—
a queen reigning over a vinyl isotope, a palindrome
descending on the essence of sitting:
of being confined to the solitude
of a building for
five months or so.

trapped would be too harsh, no
a trapping is not correct. an animal is trapped;
i am confined and of my own accord i
am defined,
as i am by my beauty.

i have existed tiredly day to
    day in my sublet
    (tempor
ary) and i remember every day to
    brush my teeth
    and scratch an essay
into paper i've stolen.

waning and waxing in the october
cider, a wrinkled face appearing in my mirror (it
is not me, it is an imagined
mother) it is compelling
but does not frighten me.

what does make me breathe
harder harder:
the soft epithets of friends
lost and searched for
in the crevices of very
old stones.
i don't know why i've searched for
connection in the drunken faces
of friends
    and strangers with veinypurplecircles
under their eyes.



Definition of Thrown Dirt | **Lindsey Bressler**

it will come to me–
in sips of mint tea, dirty
water between toes

aching ankles and
arms all attempting to make sense of history

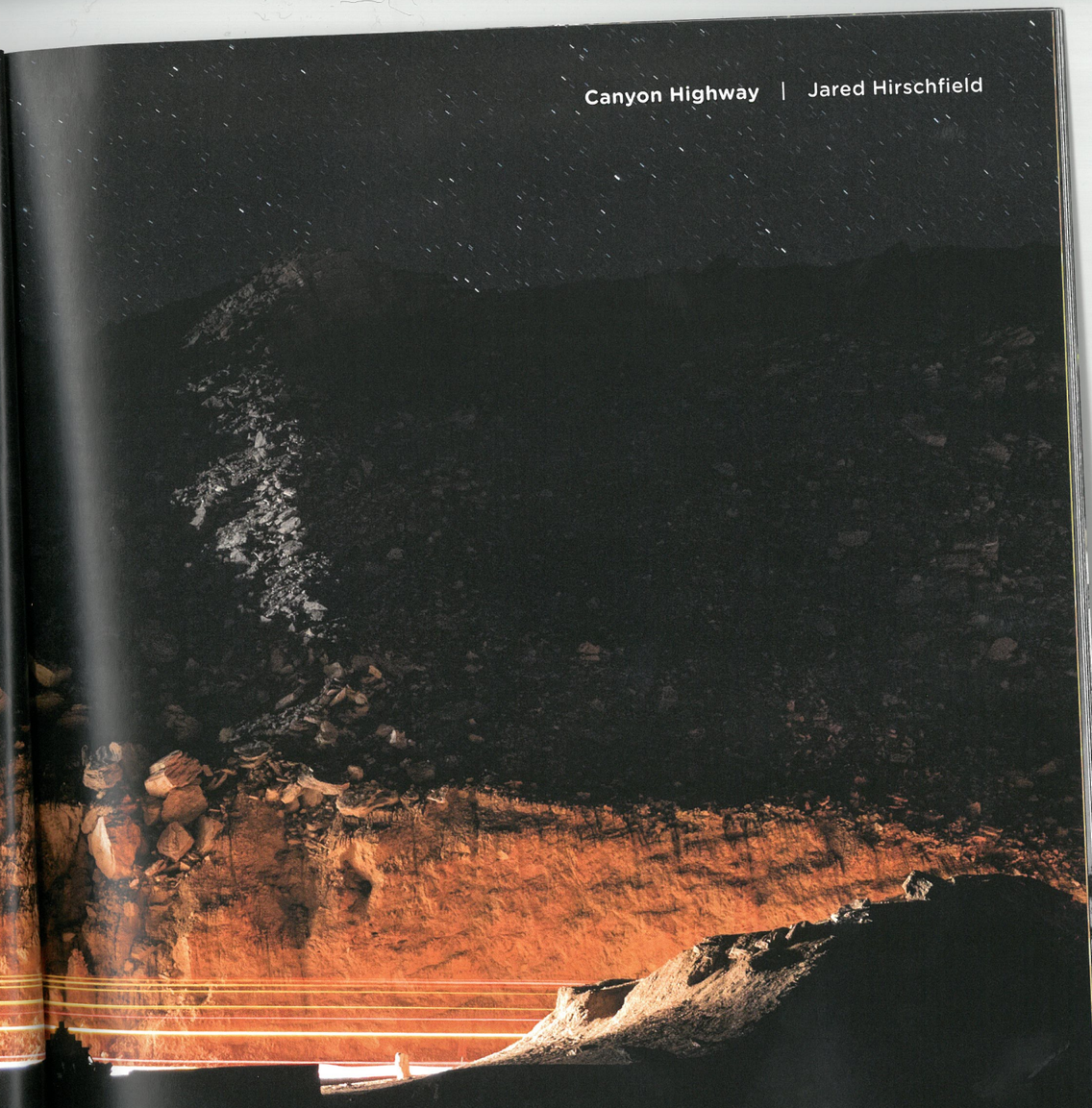
contentment is not
the same thing as containment.
freedom comes from the

muscle memory of
building a home made of mud. claiming an

ancestry rooted
galaxies far
from the stars we see.

starting with a question in one time zone and

answering it in
another.



Canyon Highway | Jared Hirschfield

orchids & hummingbirds & peach jam | Ellie MacLean

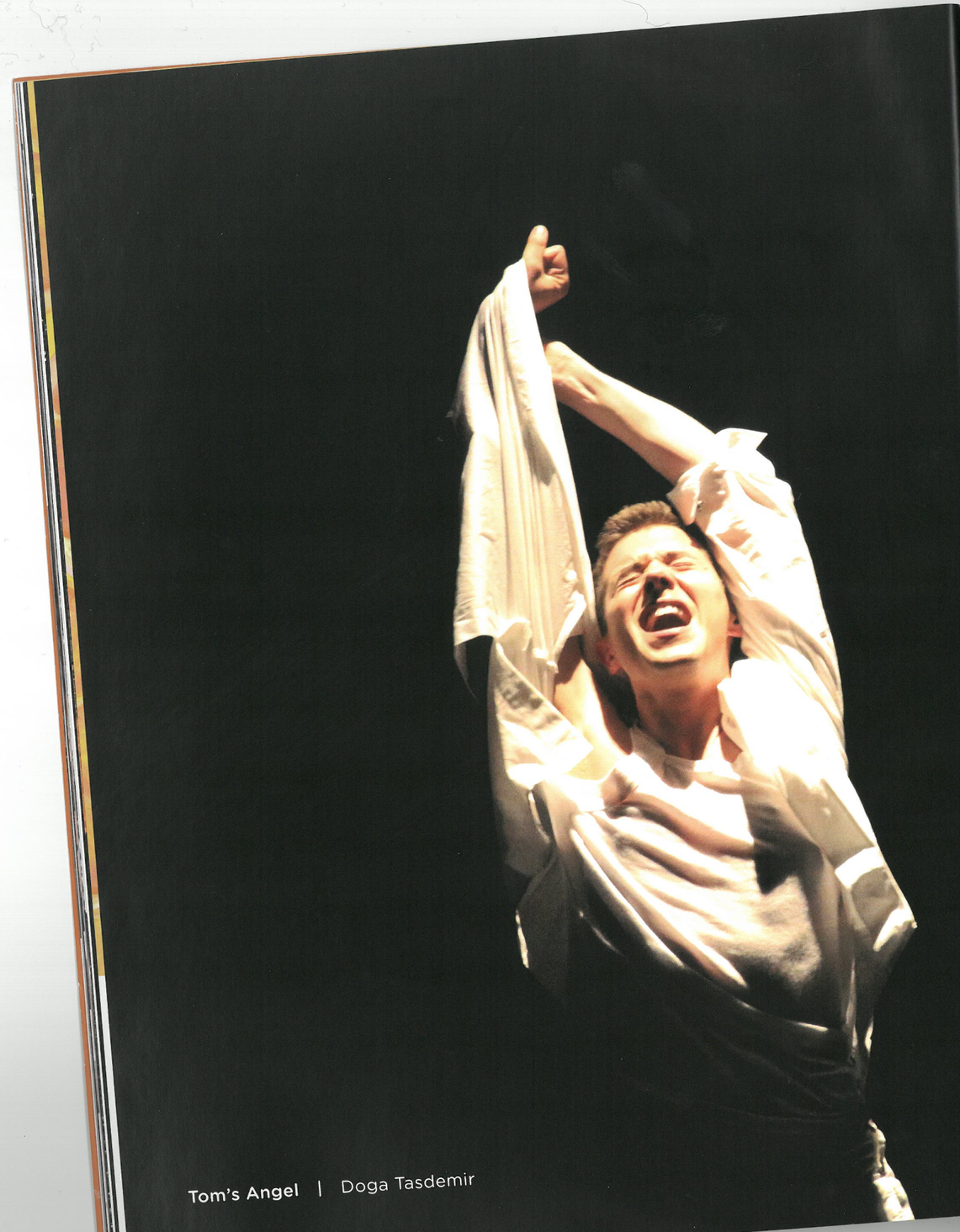
I wonder if it's fate that plays a hand
in the way I always feel lonely in the desert;
As if some great force draws me back here
in the face of heartache.
Or is there simply something about
the swallows seeking repose on the arms of cacti,
the insects incessantly lured by the yellow glow of lamplight,
the scorching sun leaving my lips persistently chapped,
that makes me feel as though I'm perpetually spinning—
Stuck in vertigo that stays sickeningly strong so long as I lie within the confines of this dry heat.
It's in these moments that I find myself climbing out of windows at midnight,
racing barefoot on the black pavement,
attempting to outrun the heavy weight of the silence.
This, a sharp contrast to the glittering lights laid out just beyond the foothills;
the enticing billboards,
the towering buildings;
the deafening noise of it all,
just out of reach.
I'm quickly learning that the composition of things can change significantly in six months,
in six miles.
Behind me, the mountains all fold into one another.
Below me, the skyscrapers do the same.

I find I am caught in-between once again-
As I watch the wildlife disappear with my every step,
I realize that humans have bred fear in the hearts of animals.
That, the resounding echo of my footsteps translates to an alarm screaming danger.
I remember the way we stared at each other from across the kitchen counter,
teeth bared,
and I don't have to wonder why.
The desire to flee in terror is a feeling I'm all too familiar with
(both inflicting and experiencing).
That night I only ever stopped running when I stumbled upon a fruit bat with broken wings, and it
hit me:
I can't just keep chasing the same dream in circles.
It's hard for me,
Because,
I don't know how to not fall in love. How to not think about you.
Despite all my reservations in romance,
I can't help but think that all the glory in the world lies in the curve of your spine,
the straight edge of your jaw.
A soft haze enraptures me entirely
as this slow cinnamon summer draws to a close.
My limbs move lazily in the sticky August heat,
and I know with full confidence that feelings fade with the seasons.

With this last wish, I hope you drink up my attention.
Every moment I've spent thinking of you,
adoring you,
a fine red wine you savor
before accidentally spilling on your white linen shirt

La Dolce Vita | Victoria Barranco

(A stain you'll grow nostalgic for, that you'll look back on with a sad fondness).
I always spend a second too long in the sun,
hoping to soak up enough warmth to sustain the coming fall.
My body never listens, turning red with the blistering pain
of being worn down too quickly.
We were all heart & lungs & smoke in the darkness,
when dawn finally came,
the light reflected an image I'll always hold too closely:
your fingers tracing my arm so carefully,
my eyes meeting yours,
your mouth a sheepish grin
before you kissed me softly on the cheek.



Tom's Angel | Doga Tasdemir

attic | Liam Bell

demons hide in the attic
making noises only i can hear
slithering and tapping
they have no shape
taking grotesque forms by choice
i can't name them
unknowable and uncatchable
they will not go away
if i was a house,
stay out of my attic
hidden in deep recesses of shadow
the places that i know are dirty
but try to ignore
those grimy, unclean parts of the attic
are where the demons hide
and wait, for the occupants to fall asleep
and to sneak out of the attic
into the house
stay out of my attic
stay out of the house at night
or at least, don't be alone
that's when my attic fails to contain them
alone, at night

Alpha's Hymn | Gwen Cusing

Sunday mornings, my father bends
at the ribcage, bones snapping, rearranging,
slicing through the onion-skin expanse of his back.

They say broken bones heal back stronger.
This is the only explanation I have
for why his throat is carpet-rubbed raw. Call
it love. Call it whatever keeps me from seeing
the ichor draining from his gaping cheeks, the glint
of teeth during homily, claws nailed
shut. He howls in tongues I cannot
understand, like praying for a miracle
I cannot comprehend.

When he was nineteen, my father
ran to the edges of earth,
just to prove that he could.
See, I was there. The sliver of red
ochre sluicing down his shins.
The cold sweat. The scabs on the inside
of his mouth, peeling.

The cruel face down the rifle sights.

Sunday evenings, I am always
listening for that baying, those prayers,
that miracle. Maybe if I listen hard enough,
my brittle bones, too, will break. Can we ever run
away from ourselves? Where he ends, I begin.
We lift our faces to the same full moon,
but as always, I am the first to turn away
and shut the door.

Wayfarer Chapel | Euvin Lee

Some people walk away, some people stay | Hang Nguyen Phi

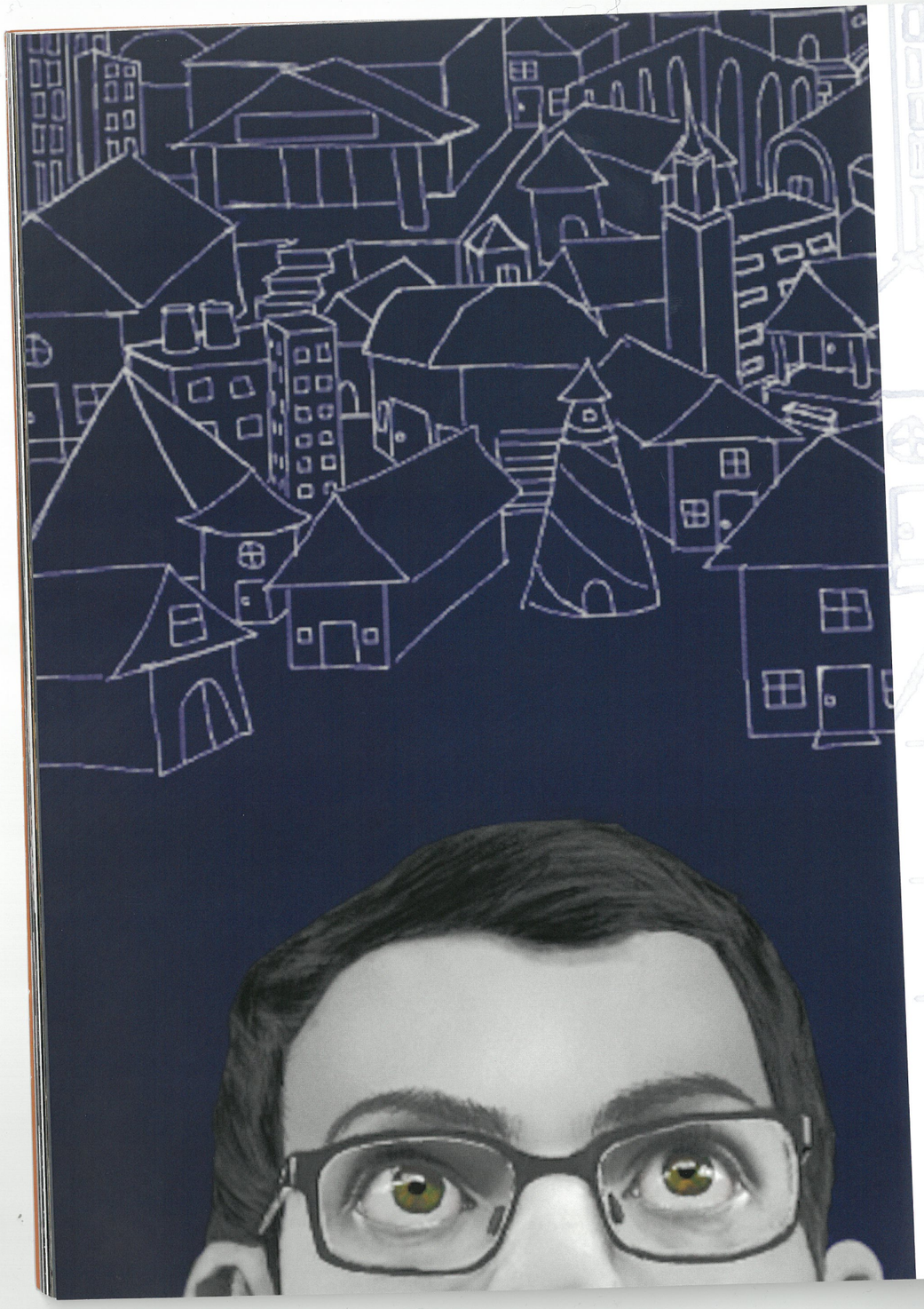
zazen | Aidan Meyer-Golden

Cot-conscious
morning passing bird catches my gaze
I focus again on the floorboards
trying to find the right line, avoiding intersection with cracks,
I focus on floorboards,
leg-stretching, landlady vaccuming, a calm incense odor,
floorboards and the length left on the burning stick
—looking for some way out,
forgetting the floorboards and
wanting to stop is the voice whispering:
cold, sore knees, books to read, haven't yet eaten.
The night finds me opening my eyes and compressing the curtain to the left
yet I still call this morning?
Yet I find the softest moments wherever I find
myself looking elsewhere
and rather than the hate accustomed
something soft nudges me and I am
such a little boy, all I have is laughter.

za zen

short-circuit | Julia Renner

when the letter with your loopy f's and q's
fell out of the fishing tackle box with the old birthday cards and polaroids
I was waiting for the jolt—
the one that comes when you see someone you've been avoiding
at the grocery store
and hide behind the bananas with your heart thumping—
because instead it was just that moment
when you come back to your apartment after a long time away
and flip on the kitchen light switch
because you forgot it doesn't work
so you stand on the cold tile in the weak glow of snow and Christmas lights
waiting for a spark,
flipping from on to off and back again,
staring at a light that has long since burned out.



Network | Brian Best

Bartleby at University | Eliza Mendoza

To the Scrivener who said
He would prefer not to:
Unknown packages tempt
No one; their being already
Dead in cobwebbed corners.
Envy and enterprise fill bins
Return to sender, printed on
Crisp white stickers, ink dragging
Helplessly, reaching for the recipient, keep the
Inbox silent in an game of postal tag
Lick the salty, bitter edge of an envelope
Dream that they can hear you

Did you hear? | Remenna Xu

As they say, it happened on Tuesday afternoon after physical education. Gongzhu had been waiting outside the north wing on the pavilion when Xiaosan walked up to her, and whispered something in her ear. The reports say that she ran away without her pink umbrella, despite the stormy forecast. I noticed Xiaosan picking it up, and three weeks later, our lovely Honghai was carrying Gongzhu's umbrella around school. The yellow flowers around the border had faded slightly, and the pink sheen was dirtier, but Gongzhu's black signature was still boldly inked onto the handle. Like a warning. As Honghai preened in her new honor as Xiaosan's girlfriend, Gongzhu looked away, obsidian eyes flashing briefly before dulling to a cool shine. But she was no match for Honghai, who was beautiful, with rosy cheeks and a gentle air. Gongzhu's only victory was her hair, dark and rich and heavy. She grew it long, black as night and decadent. Her one pride.

I first noticed Honghai's hands during mathematics. She sits with her back hunched, as if there is a roll hugging her spine, like she is waiting for someone to come and gently press her shoulders back. If Gongzhu is a heron, then Honghai is a river reed.

There was a black mark. That day I leaned over and offered Honghai a napkin, assuming that the dark smudge was dirt. She looked at me with wide eyes, then hastily grabbed my hand and pressed it tightly. Seconds later she released, and turned my palm over and over; I heard her muttering, in harsh breath: "why is there no stain?"

It rained all that week, and into the next. Every day, from the fourth story homeroom classroom, I watched Honghai carry that pink umbrella, dirtied and withered in a matter of weeks. I watched her wilt under the weight of something so light, noticing with faint interest in the way she dressed in longer sleeves, drowning herself in cloth and fabrics. Gongzhu carried on silently. She arrived to class just as the day began, and left promptly when Teacher dismissed us for the day. I noticed subtle streaks of white painting Gongzhu's pool of blackest hair.

The school day had already ended when Honghai pulled me into the restroom, her gloved hand digging into my wrist as she pushed the door closed. She tore off her glove, killing any possible sense of ceremony. A flash of white wool, and then black. I blinked. Again. Again. But I was right. Blackness, inky and sickly shiny as a mess of poured tar. I reeled back in disgust, staring in paralyzed distaste as she slowly took off the second glove, fingers trembling. We stood under the fluorescent glare in silence for one minute, then two. Gingerly, I used two fingers to push up her sleeves, the fabric of her sleeves reluctantly giving up their hold. Repulsive. The black continued up her arm, past her elbow. I felt it appropriate to wash her arms. I scrubbed her skin raw with a cloth. Tiny bubbles of red rising against the background of pure black. I don't know how long we stood there, until our fingerpads grew wrinkles, until the sound of our classmates' footsteps disappeared. Nothing rubbed clean.

I pulled her sleeves back down, helped her cover up. I brushed her hair. I shuffled all the way to my home, sank into the bath, and traced the valleys that slowly pruned along my skin until the water turned cold and I couldn't remember what hour it was. Two nights after, I heard that Honghai had died. In school, rumors whispered that she jumped in front of a train, or was kidnapped by a predator. Who knows.

I didn't see Xiaosan until suddenly, across the schoolyard, I saw him rush in, and launch the wrinkled pink umbrella at Gongzhu's feet. She didn't flinch, even as he stood there panting. I remember exactly what she said: "What do you expect me to do?" Xiaosan staring at her, his mouth open, and Gongzhu's crimson lips curling into a polite smile. Just barely visible beneath her sheath of white hair, as pure as crisp, new snow.

It rained that afternoon. Walking home I passed by Gongzhu, her umbrella already looking brighter somehow. I said something about Honghai, something along the lines of "What a shame" or "Isn't it sad?" She nodded, and I heard the beginning of a laugh, brief and beautiful, before it was lost in the sound of the city. Watching her walk away, I was mesmerized by how her lovely hair seemed to shine darker with every step she took. I remember asking Gongzhu about her hair, once. I asked her what her secret was, how she kept it so thick, and black as darkest night. A pause, before she replied that it was simply a gift. And I believe that. I think if you had the courage to ask Gongzhu anything, she'd tell the truth.

Nightlight | Kristin Terry

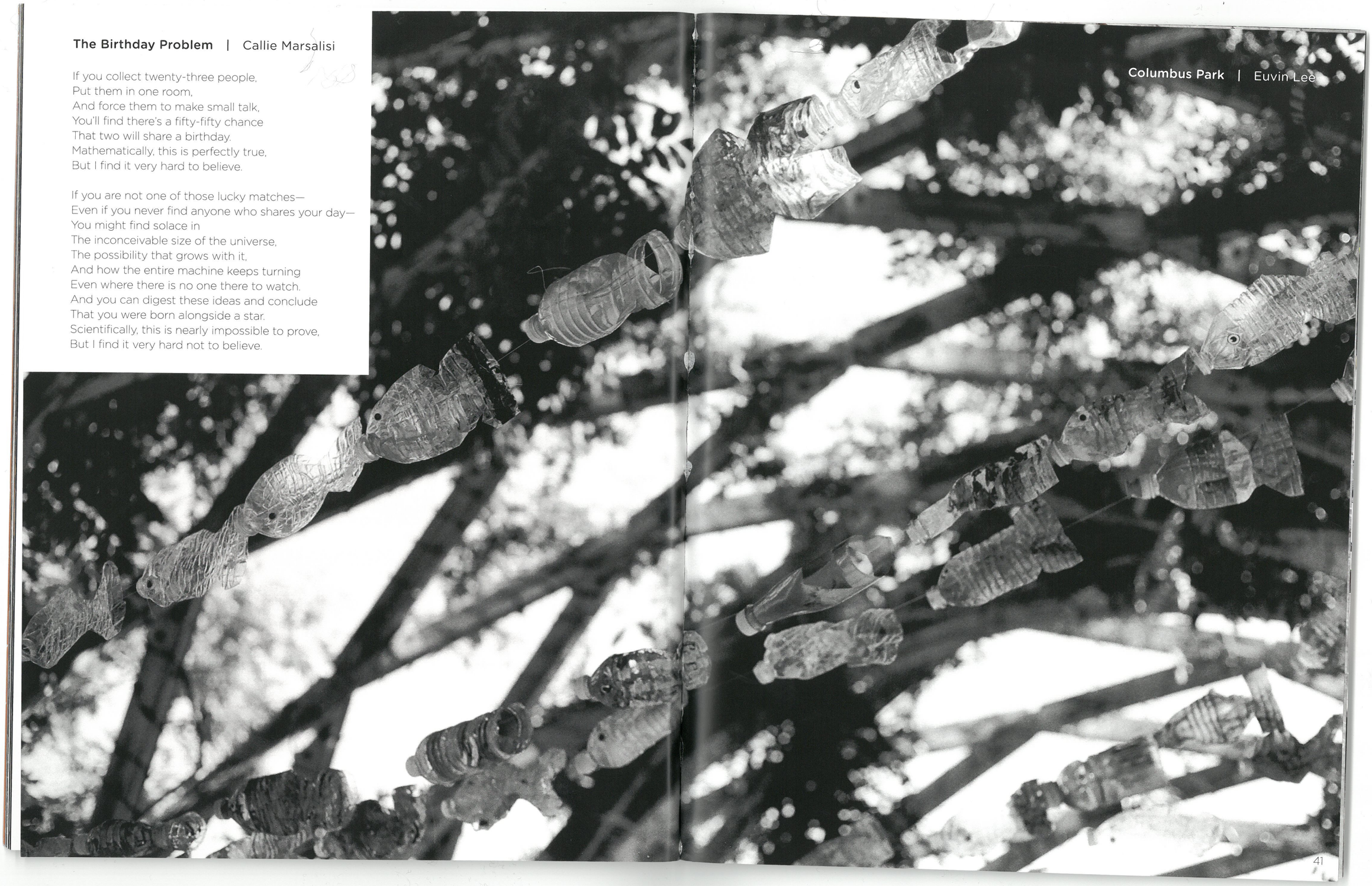
Midtown | Elke Thoms

There is an overwhelming feeling
that every night in is a missed opportunity
to meet someone,
even though it always goes the same—
I accept the drinks but I don't find them poetic,
certainly not romantic—
"please, become a little less you,"
by the way, "you're a lot more fun that way," too.
A million babes asked to this room
at four a.m., but you say you've never met anyone like me,
racing down the hall
high on nothing but your mouth
and Evian.
Yet, my whimsy is not enough
to get you off your speech:
our atoms are only aligned for now,
there's just so much networking to do.
So I smile, spin, turn to go.
"Hey, wait—"
Sorry, the position is no longer available.
I too have spent enough nights making love to my resume
to know a padded phrase
when I hear one.

The Birthday Problem | Callie Marsalisi

If you collect twenty-three people,
Put them in one room,
And force them to make small talk,
You'll find there's a fifty-fifty chance
That two will share a birthday.
Mathematically, this is perfectly true,
But I find it very hard to believe.

If you are not one of those lucky matches—
Even if you never find anyone who shares your day—
You might find solace in
The inconceivable size of the universe,
The possibility that grows with it,
And how the entire machine keeps turning
Even where there is no one there to watch.
And you can digest these ideas and conclude
That you were born alongside a star.
Scientifically, this is nearly impossible to prove,
But I find it very hard not to believe.



Columbus Park | Euvin Lee

Maze | Arunima Prasad

Down South | *Elissa Fertig*

I can't live without all that is good to me
in sweet tea
cornfields roving like stitched sunlight.
I could not live without all those memories
of late afternoon light on the back porch
sweat on the rim of the mason jar sporting some
pale ale that Clifton drinks till the tap is dry.
And I am here for that.
I am here for the men with dark drawls
for the cracked smiles, the "little darlin"s
whispered warm in my ear on the back porch
like a lullaby.

Science Fiction | Ellie MacLean

I.
I've never been to Connecticut,
but I think I'd like it there.
The way the trees around us bent towards each other
on that November afternoon made me feel nostalgic;
a sickly sweet aching in the bottom of my stomach.
I felt the impulse to tell you about myself,
but found that I was falling short.
Instead I turned the music up,
and stared at you from the corner of my eye,
an attempt to hide the fact that I wanted to memorize
every detail of that moment.
The first time you drove me home
I wondered how it'd feel to hold your hand.

II.
At this very moment
there is a man attempting to swim
the entire length
of the Atlantic ocean.
By immersing himself in the water,
propelling his entire being through the sea for
eight hours a day,
over one-thousand nine-hundred miles,
for five months,
he attempts to drown
his own depression.
Isn't it confounding
to want to delve deeply
into the unknown
simply to escape the monotony
of the present?
I've never wanted to test my body's limits before,
to throw myself into an impossible
ambiguity,
but tonight is different.
as I sit perched on the edge of your bed,
your steps gently approaching from the kitchen,
I have mere seconds to make a decision,
and the adrenaline coursing through my chest
anticipates your touch.

III.
Your voice proved to be epochal,
ebbing in like the setting sun through the spaces
between the blinds.
It was trying to rise against the wind
when I only ever wanted to make a quiet retreat.
When I am shaken awake by poor intentions
I imagine myself lost in a forest.
I'm sorry (but I don't know what for)

IV.
In a testament to my youth
I allowed for the release of rationality
only to realize I was seeking repentance
in alleyways and not churches.
I want everything at once:
closure, reassurance, independence.
Before you, I had never known the soft hands
of patience.

V.
Under Christmas light filled branches
on the coldest day of the year,
I pulled you towards me selfishly.
Enticed by you,
but not
enthralled by you,
I held you simultaneously
in my palm
and at arm's length.
I only reveled in your attention.
I wanted to dance alone,
but I wanted you to watch.

VI.
A heart flutter
that lasted
four months.
I will continue to contemplate
the hypothetical; the what ifs.
I've never wanted anything else
but oh god, one day I might.

Love. | Hang Nguyen Phi

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